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In the Contact Zone: Code-switching Strategies by Latino/a Writers

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The fact that I
am writing to you
in English
already falsifies what I
wanted to tell you
My subject:
how to explain to you that I
don't belong to English
though I belong nowhere else

—Gustavo Pérez Firmat 3

The Rise of New "Englishes"

In *Weird English,* Evelyn Nien-Ming Ch'ien examines the innovative renditions of English produced by immigrant and postcolonial writers. She argues that writers such as Arundhati Roy, Maxine Hong Kingston, Salman Rushdie, and Junot Díaz share a desire to create a new English that represents their "third-world" perspective in a world that seeks to marginalize the voices of these writers' communities. She states, "Weird English wants to do more with English than communicate what the subject is; it also wants to show who the speaker is and how the speaker can appro-

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priate the language" (8). While she studies a disparate group of writers, she argues that the new Englishes they produce destabilize the established standard language and permit other languages to share the status enjoyed by English; these writers also unapologetically break the rules of English. Their reworked varieties of English often implicate other languages by incorporating elements from their structure and sound system, if not the "foreign" words themselves. By producing a "balancing act of intelligibility and experiment" (Ch'ien 11), immigrant and postcolonial writers create a new variety without completely assimilating the norms and conventions of the dominant language. As outsiders, such writers appropriate English from a novel perspective.

Much of the Latino/a literature written in English in the US incorporates Spanish at some level. Code-switching, the alternation of two languages in a verbal or written text, is often featured in poetry, drama, and performance art, particularly work that is published by Latino/a presses. Many analyses of code-switching in Chicano/a and Nuyorican poetry discuss the significance of this practice. Critics such as Keller, Lipski, and Aparicio agree that code-switching is an artistic choice with political ramifications. Using Spanish in an English language text serves to legitimize the much-maligned practice of mixing codes in vernacular speech.[1] In the United States, the presence of large and small Latino/a communities across the country, increasing numbers of Latino/a immigrants, and the US/Mexican border means that code-switching in literature is not only metaphorical, but represents a reality where segments of the population are living between cultures and languages; literary language actualizes the discourse of the border and bilingual/bicultural communities.

In this essay, I focus on one mainstream space where Spanish and English are in contact; specifically, I analyze the use of Spanish in Latino/a literary texts written since the 1990s in the United States. Through strategies that range from very infrequent and transparent use of Spanish to prose that requires a bilingual reader, Latino/a authors negotiate their relationships to homelands, languages, and transnational identifications. The strategies they use lend themselves to multiple readings and differing levels of accessibility. While the United States is a hostile climate for

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multilingualism and diverse cultures, Latino/a prose writers who use Spanish in their work continue to impact the literary sphere and to a lesser or greater extent insist on documenting and textualizing the reality of a multilingual America. These strategies that I discuss are manifest in most Latino/a prose fiction published in the last few decades. The specific examples come from a range of recently published Latino/a texts (1990 to 2004); I also choose texts from Latino/a writers who have publicly discussed their use of Spanish in prose writing.

Strategies for Inclusion of Spanish in Latino/a Texts

Divergent opinions concerning the inclusion and function of Spanish in the works of Latino/a writers suggests they choose a variety of strategies to portray a bicultural and bilingual world and that they may have different readers in mind as they craft their texts.[2] Given language politics in the US, a writer's linguistic choice can be a political act, but it also speaks to the reality of the market place.[3] In the context of Latino/a texts published by mainstream presses, the reader is largely imagined as a monolingual English speaker. Questions of italicizing Spanish, providing translations, and adding glossaries must be negotiated between authors, editors, and publishers. Those writers who have achieved a degree of success and greater marketability have more say as to the frequency and appearance of Spanish in the text. On the other hand, although Spanish may have been the first language of many second-generation Latino/a writers, most are English dominant and have been formally educated in the United States. They are writing and publishing in the US, so choosing English as their literary language reflects the reality of their intellectual education and of the market place.

While in most Latino/a texts, English is clearly the dominant code, Spanish lexical items and phrases can be incorporated in an English language text at different levels. The most common strategy used by Latino/a prose writers published by mainstream presses is to include only those Spanish words whose meaning is obvious from the context. These include culturally recognizable items like food (mango, taco, tortilla, etc.), places (casa, rancho, playa, etc.), familiar common nouns (mamá, hermano, hijo), and so

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forth. These items of easily accessible Spanish may serve to Latinize the text, conjuring those few well-known items identifiable to the monolingual as "Latino" or "Spanish." While the words might have different connotations and cultural significance in each of the languages, because of their familiarity and circulation in popular culture, the general meanings of these items are easily understood and assimilated by readers with little or no knowledge of Spanish. A second option that does not challenge the monolingual reader is the use of Spanish followed by an English language translation; rather than being playful or subversive, these translations offer a close approximation of the Spanish word or phrase. In contrast, a less used option occurs when Spanish appears with no translation, and the terms are not italicized, or marked as foreign in any way. There are also instances of "calques," which are creative English renditions of Spanish words and phrases translated literally or figuratively. In this case, Spanish is indirectly, or covertly, present in the English language text. For example, some of the characters in Cisneros's novel *Caramelo* have odd sounding English names that are translations of common Spanish names; for example, "Aunty White-Skin" is recognizable to the bilingual as Titi Blanca.

The first two strategies (the use of easily accessible Spanish and translation) create a more ethnic text. But they also may serve to perpetuate mainstream expectations of the Latino/a text in that they can make the text exotic and allow the reader to believe that s/he is interacting with and appropriating the linguistic Other, while in reality a reader does not have to leave the comfortable realm of his/her own complacent monolingualism. The monolingual is catered to and the bilingual reader must endure redundant references. Writers who favor the last two strategies (untranslated Spanish and word or phrasal calques) seem to prioritize the bilingual reader and may cause instances of discomfort or annoyance to the monolingual reader. These strategies subvert the commodification of Spanish and gratify the bilingual, bicultural reader. Many Latino/a texts incorporate all of these tendencies in their work while few utilize Spanish exclusively in more subversive ways. Lastly and much more infrequently, Latino/a texts may be completely bilingual, so that they can be accessed successfully only by

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readers knowledgeable in both Spanish and English. In what follows, I provide examples and explore each of these strategies.

Easily Accessed, Transparent, or Cushioned Spanish

What do writers achieve when they intersperse Spanish in English language prose texts? If Spanish were always used to represent dialogue, one could argue that writers were producing ethnographically nuanced texts that capture the linguistic reality of the bilingual, code-switching members of the community. However, very few of the texts that contain Spanish present it only in the context of the speech of their characters. Writers of these texts are not using Spanish merely to recreate authentic dialogue. Rather, their language represents a culturally specific Latinidad—they use Spanish to reference their particular histories, experiences, demographic realities, and ways of being Latino/a.[4]

Arteaga argues that any appearance of Spanish in English language contexts undermines monolingualism in the United States because it "undercuts claims of prevalence, centrality, and superiority and confirms the condition of heteroglossia" (14). In the case of recent Latino/a fiction, this is overstating the case; I would agree with Rudin that most of the Spanish in Latino/a prose fiction is easily understood by a monolingual speaker and is written with the monolingual reader in mind.[5] In an analysis of the use of code-switching in Latino/a prose fiction from 1970 to 2000, Laura Callahan similarly found that the use of Spanish was very limited, "the style of code-switching predictable, and the cognitive demands on the monolingual reader in English minimal" (418).[6] In fact, bilingual knowledge is often unnecessary because of redundancy and explication of the Spanish text for the monolingual reader. This type of focus on monolingual readers can make such texts plodding for a bilingual audience. Still, the appearance of Spanish alongside the English texts marks the texts as "Latino/a" in a direct manner and thus may indeed challenge monolingualism at a surface level.

In some texts, few Spanish words occur and most (except the most obvious) are translated for the reader. Writers may desire to mark the text as Latino/a at the linguistic level but may not wish to alienate monolingual English readers. When asked about the use of

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Spanish in her stories, Nicholasa Mohr explains, "I use it sparingly because I feel that the reader might not be getting the point. I am concerned for my readers, so I manage to make my intent clear. With poets it's different. They can read their work aloud and have close contact with their public. When I do use words in Spanish, I follow them up in English in a way that is clear" (qtd. in Hernández 93). Mohr's comments suggest that she has a monolingual audience in mind as she writes, or at least that she is concerned about the accessibility of her work to monolingual readers. In Mohr's writing, Spanish terms are not translated typically if they are cushioned by the text or their meaning is transparent: "Midday was the time when folks went home, showered, ate an abundant *almuerzo* and then took a long *siesta*" ("A Matter of Pride" 11). Usually the Spanish words are italicized and thus marked as foreign. *Almuerzo* is not translated since there is enough cushioning in the sentence (midday, ate) to clue the monolingual as to the possible meaning, and "siesta" is not translated because it is an example of an easily accessible Spanish word.[7]

Similarly, Judith Ortiz Cofer remarks that she does not code-switch in her writing; she uses Spanish sparingly to convey the linguistic world in which her characters live. She says, "What I do is to use Spanish to flavor my language, but I don't switch. The context of the sentence identifies and defines the words, so my language is different from that; it's not code-switching. It is using Spanish as a formula to remind people that what they're reading or hearing comes from the minds and the thoughts of Spanish-speaking people. I want my readers to remember that." She goes on to state that she chose English as her literary language because that is the language she knew best and concludes: "My English is not a political choice; it's a choice of expediency" (qtd. in Hernández 102).[8] Often in Ortiz Cofer's texts, Spanish terms are directly translated into English, as in "*Así es la vida, hijas*: That is the way life is" ("Nada" 58). Or, a word that appears in English is translated in Spanish and appears italicized immediately following the English language term: "She felt a sense of destiny, *el destino*, a powerful force taking over her life" ("Corazón's Café" 97).

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In an extension of this strategy, terms in Spanish are italicized and explained in English, as in the following example from Esmeralda Santiago's *When I was Puerto Rican*:

> At home we listened to *aguinaldos*, songs about the birth of Jesus and the joys of spending Christmas surrounded by family and friends. We sang about the Christmas traditions of Puerto Rico, about the *parrandas*, in which people went from house to house singing, eating, drinking, and celebrating, about pig roasts and *ron canita*, homemade rum, which was plentiful during the holidays. (40)

Santiago says of her use of Spanish: "I pay a lot of attention to the weight of words. Any word that's in Spanish in my English texts is not there by accident, or because I couldn't figure out how to translate it, but rather because it has a resonance in Spanish that it doesn't have in English" (qtd. in Kevane and Heredia 135). In this passage, Santiago provides an ethnographic description of Puerto Rican cultural traditions for the uninformed monolingual reader.[9] She highlights these cultural terms that could not be translated easily into English.

In the preceding examples, although Spanish is used, the text is familiarized for the monolingual reader. Such texts might be valuable because they introduce Spanish to monolingual readers in an unintimidating manner. Ideally, monolingual readers would learn that the Spanish language is an intrinsic part of Latino/a life and thus of the American multilingual reality. Having Spanish alongside the English text provides one more public site where Spanish shares textual space with English.[10] It might also encourage second and third generation Latino/as who are English dominant or monolingual to become reacquainted with their heritage language.

However, an alternate analysis might suggest that such Latino/a texts reinforce monolingual linguistic complacency. From this perspective, cushioning Spanish in this way may allow the reader to sense that s/he is entering the linguistic world of bilingual Latino/as without having to make any effort. In "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance," bell hooks discusses how in contemporary US society "difference" is often presented as a site of pleasure. Contact with "difference" can be transformative and revolutionary, but in a context of inequality and exploitation it can reinscribe

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white supremacy and the status quo, particularly if such contact does not involve any potential loss of power.[11] hooks states, "When race and ethnicity become commodified as resources for pleasure, the cultures of specific groups, as well as the bodies of individuals, can be seen as constituting an alternate playground where members of dominating races, genders, sexual practices affirm their power-over in intimate relations with the Other" (23). Doris Sommer also warns against arrogant appropriation and the "ravages of facile intimacies" (xiii) in her book on "minority discourse." She points out that dominant group members often expect that as skilled and diligent readers, they should be able to resolve any difficulty presented by the text, since they expect that unequal relationships should be neutralized on the page. When reading texts by cultural others, mainstream readers expect to gain access to other worlds, not to be made aware of their limitations.[12]

The appearance of "foreign" terms in a text does serve to underscore the cross-cultural nature of the text, but how they are employed matters. Foreign words can be used in ways that support mainstream culture, just as English words can be used in ways that resist standard usage and connotations. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tifflin point out that untranslated words in a text seem to have a special power to signify a culture and an identity, but it is important not to be carried away by the romantic notion that they always operate in ways that empower a minority culture. In all the previous examples, translation tends to negate the text's difference and renders "the other" familiar. As Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tifflin argue, "The problem with glossing in the cross-cultural text is that, at its worst, it may lead to a considerably stilted movement of plot as the story is forced to drag an explanatory machinery behind it" (61). They argue that not translating foreign words is a political act, because glossing gives the translated word and the receptor language more prestige.[13] In the preceding examples, Spanish is presented but then virtually canceled and familiarized for the monolingual through translation. In some Latino/a texts, a glossary at the end of the book provides further assurances that the monolingual reader does not have to languish in unfamiliar territory. In these texts, authors give primacy to their monolingual readers.

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Gratifying the Bilingual Reader

Some Latino/a texts, while published by mainstream presses, quite frequently seem to favor the bilingual, bicultural reader. These Latinized texts tend to provide special pleasure to the bilingual reader; monolingual readers may not have complete access to the text and while they can often decipher the meaning from the context, sometimes they must resort to a dictionary, and occasionally no reference book will help. A variety of strategies that Latino/a writers use can make texts more engaging for bilingual readers.

One strategy is the use of untranslated or otherwise marked standard or informal Spanish in the text. Junot Díaz takes an uncompromising stance with regard to the interplay of languages in his work. He states:

> For me allowing the Spanish to exist in my text without the benefit of italics or quotations marks a very important political move. Spanish is not a minority language. Not in this hemisphere, not in the United States, not in the world inside my head. So why treat it like one? Why "other" it? Why de-normalize it? By keeping Spanish as normative in a predominantly English text, I wanted to remind readers of the mutability of languages. And to mark how steadily English is transforming Spanish and Spanish is transforming English. (qtd. in Ch'ien 204)

In the short stories of Junot Díaz, Spanish words are not italicized or otherwise tagged as foreign. While the Spanish in his texts consists primarily of single nouns, often these are cultural terms or slang from Caribbean Spanish as in, "He had a housekeeping guiso then, mostly in Piscataway ("Otra Vida, Otra Vez" 188), and "My mother tells me Beto's home, waits for me to say something. . . . He's a pato now but last year we were friends" (*Drown* 91). As used in these sentences, the meaning of the words "guiso" (gig) and "pato" (pejorative term for a homosexual) would not be found in most dictionaries.

An extension of this strategy is to leave untranslated phrases or entire sentences. In her novel *Under the Feet of Jesus*, Helena Viramontes occasionally does not translate many lines in a dialogue, and, as a result, these portions of the text are only accessible

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to the bilingual reader. When asked about the use of Spanish in her texts, Viramontes states, "A few years ago a southwestern writer, Cormac McCarthy, wrote *All the Pretty Horses*. If I remember correctly, there were whole paragraphs in Spanish. Not one reviewer questioned it, not one reader said, 'I wish there was a glossary.' But if a Spanish-surnamed writer uses Spanish, it becomes an issue. Readers feel purposely excluded, like, why are you keeping this from me? Well, I'm sorry. How could I not give integrity to the characters?" (qtd. in Kevane and Heredia 135). In the following example, Viramontes plays with bilingual puns that are not translated, and a level of meaning is lost on the monolingual reader:

> There is a girl over there, Alejo whispered.
> -It's the sun, 'mano. Fried your sesos.
> Alejo could barely make her out before the twilight turned her into a silhouette. She hadn't even looked around.
> -Pronto, 'mano. Estoy pensando en garrapatas, no garranalgas. (39)

While the meaning of the first two Spanish references: "mano" (brother) and "sesos" (brains) can probably be guessed from the context, the final reference cannot. The pun "I am thinking about ticks (since they are climbing trees and stealing mangos at night) rather than skirt-chasing" is not even accessible to those with a good bilingual dictionary, since "garranalgas" (butt grabber) is a pun based on the legitimate Spanish compound word "garrapata." A monolingual reader might feel frustrated because this reference is inaccessible.

As many critics have noted, Sandra Cisneros's stories skillfully engage the monolingual reader, while her use of both languages doubly rewards the bilingual, bicultural reader, because she incorporates Spanish liberally in many of her texts.[14] In her collection of short stories, *Woman Hollering Creek,* she italicizes Spanish words but does not mark obvious translations from Spanish that probably read oddly to the monolingual reader, but amuse the bilingual one. Cisneros states flatly that she will not make translation concessions for the Anglo reader and adds that, "The reader who is going to like my stories the best and catch all the subtexts

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and subtleties, that even my editor can't catch, are Chicanos" (qtd. in Jussawalla and Dasenbrock 290).

Cisneros's title, *Woman Hollering Creek*, is a play on the mythical figure of Mexican folklore "la llorona." In the myth, la llorona murdered her children and now can be heard wailing in the night for them. In Cisneros's text the reference is twice removed from its origin. The "llorona" (the wailer) becomes the more powerful "gritona" (screamer) who is then rendered as the English language "hollering woman" of the title. This is fitting since the story concerns a Chicana who helps a Mexican woman escape from her abusive husband. After letting out a blood-curdling scream as they cross the creek in her pick-up truck, the driver explains that she always does that as she crosses the creek which bears the story's title.[15] This empowers the fleeing victimized woman, just as the taking of linguistic power delights the bilingual reader.

Frequently Cisneros also provides some novel translations of words and ideas rather than literal renderings, so the bilingual reading is enriched; for example, presenting "la consentida" (literally: the spoiled one) as the "princess," is not a literal translation but the monolingual gets the point, while the bilingual reader, has the idea reiterated in a novel way. Aparicio terms this third strategy as "tropicalized English," which she describes as "A transformation and rewriting of Anglo signifiers from the Latino cultural viewpoint" ("On Sub-Versive Signifiers" 796). In the short story "Little Miracles, Kept Promises" from *Woman Hollering Creek*, Cisneros uses a combination of these strategies. The story consists of letters by Mexicans and Chicano/as requesting miracles of patron saints and the virgin. Some of the letters are in English, some employ code-switching, and several are entirely in Spanish. The bilingual, bicultural reader will derive most pleasure from this text, while the monolingual reader will find parts of it inaccessible.

Even writers who do not take such an uncompromising view of bilingualism in their work sometimes utilize such strategies. Esmeralda Santiago's novel *America's Dream*, in contrast to her first book, *When I was Puerto Rican*, does not contain a glossary for the Spanish used in the text and Spanish words are not italicized. While some of the Spanish terms in the text are cushioned, the text offers the bilingual reader moments of pleasure that are

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inaccessible to the monolingual reader. For example, one of the main characters is a domineering, cruel batter named "Correa," a common Spanish name. The monolingual reader will miss the point that the meaning of the noun "correa" (belt) is a very fitting name for this violent character, while this will not be lost on the bilingual reader. In her novel, Santiago also uses place names that will resonate with the bilingual reader. One chapter begins "It's uphill from Esperanza to Destino" (16). For the monolingual English reader, these are just place names, but the bilingual reader understands that the main character has left hope behind and is about to embark on a difficult journey. The author plays with bilingual puns; meanwhile, her subversive use of English and Spanish rewards the bilingual, bicultural reader.

An extension of this strategy incorporates Spanish but leaves unmarked obvious translations from Spanish. In one short story Ortiz Cofer writes, "But she had said, '*No gracias*,' to the funeral, and she sent the flag and metals back marked *Ya no vive aquí:* Does not live here anymore. Tell the Mr. President of the United States what I say: *No gracias*" ("Nada" 51). The phrase "tell the Mr. President" might sound odd to a monolingual English speaker, but the bilingual reader might recognize that this is a direct translation from "Dile al señor presidente."

Radical Bilingualism

Giannini Braschi's *Yo-Yo Boing!* and Susana Chávez-Silverman's *Killer Crónicas* are two recently published prose works that employ sustained code-switching; because of this, they can only be read by a bilingual audience. Not surprisingly, academic presses, rather than mainstream ones, have published these texts. Linguistic experimentation in Latino/a prose texts published in the US is not a new phenomenon. Beginning in the 1970s, prose writers such as Tomás Rivera and Roberto Fernández produced linguistically diverse texts that challenged both Spanish and English monolingual expectations. Tomás Rivera's masterpiece ". . . *y no se lo tragó la tierra*" (1971) was written in the colloquial Spanish dialect that was typical of Mexican migrant workers in the Southwest in the 1940s and 1950s. Readers who are not familiar

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with this dialect find the text challenging to read. Roberto Fernández's *La vida es un especial $.75* (1981), published by Ediciones Universal, seeks to capture the bilingual experience of working-class Cubans in Miami. While primarily written in Spanish, this text captures the broad array of Spanish and English linguistic options used by bilingual speakers. Monolingual speakers of both languages would find parts of this text difficult to read. These and similar texts were locally distributed by small presses and thus they could address regional concerns and present linguistic realities that were not represented in mainstream presses. As Martín-Rodríguez points out, Chicano/a writers who published nontraditional texts had tremendous freedom to render texts that depicted the rich linguistic repertoire of Chicano/as because their primary audience was their own community. These authors, as well as the more recent Latino/a writers who experiment with language in more modest ways (such as Junot Díaz, Sandra Cisneros, and Helena Viramontes), have created a space for the publication of books that challenge linguistic norms for texts published in the US. In addition, the growth of Latino/a communities in the United States and the success of Latino/a authors in the mainstream market have paved the way for writers who want to attempt more daring linguistic experiments.

Braschi's and Chávez-Silverman's texts can be placed in a trajectory of autobiographical writing established by Latina writers such as Cherríe Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Rosario and Aurora Morales, who wrote memoirs that bilingually perform their bicultural, borderland experiences.[16] However, both Braschi and Chávez-Silverman take the bilingual performance to an entirely new level.

Braschi is a first generation Puerto Rican poet who with *Yo-Yo Boing!* produces her first work of bilingual prose. As Jean Franco and Alexandra Vega-Merino explain in the introduction, this text is best read as a performance piece. It contains bilingual poetry, monologues, and dialogues sandwiched between two Spanish language chapters. That the text begins and ends in Spanish is not surprising, given that the majority of Braschi's previous publications were exclusively in Spanish. Her publishing history and these monolingual sections suggest that Braschi is a Spanish-dominant speaker who is experimenting with a new form. The extensive

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bilingual section consists primarily of long dialogues, sometimes between Braschi and others or between other people who share her New York academic bilingual world. This is a daring exercise for a Puerto Rican writer, especially given the controversy over the use of English by Puerto Rican writers from the island. Rosario Ferré, for example, has been severely criticized by some Puerto Ricans for choosing to translate her Spanish language novels into English and for writing some of her texts in English and then translating them to Spanish. In Puerto Rico, the Spanish language is the most important symbol of identity and nationalism, so by writing in Spanish and English Braschi is making a radical statement.

In *Yo-Yo Boing!*, Braschi explicitly voices her attitude about bilingualism in a conversation with another protagonist who holds more conservative views:

> If I respected languages like you do, I wouldn't write at all. El muro de Berlín fue derribado. Why can't I do the same. Desde la torre de Babel, las lenguas han sido siempre una forma de divorciarnos del resto de la humanidad. Poetry must find ways of breaking distance. I am not reducing my audience. On the contrary, I am going to have a bigger audience with the common market—in Europe—in America. And besides, all languages are dialects that are made to break new grounds. I feel like Dante and Petrarca, and Boccaccio and I even feel like Garcilaso forging a new language. Saludo al nuevo siglo, el siglo del nuevo lenguaje de América y le digo adiós a la retórica separatista y a los atavismos. (142)

Braschi recognizes that languages are always evolving and that it is fruitless and elitist to attempt to arrest language change. Writing in the vernacular of the people will expand, rather than decrease, her audience. Braschi implies that while today bilingual ways of speaking are considered ungrammatical and illegitimate, it is only a matter of time before this changes and bilingual communication is accepted. *Yo-Yo Boing!*, a text written by a well-known Puerto Rican poet, contributes to the task of making bilingual prose writing acceptable and legitimate.

Susana Chávez-Silverman similarly experiments with language mixing in her Spanglish memoir, *Killer Crónicas*. The language of the text captures the author's bicultural reality and her transna-

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tional experiences living in an "in between" place. As a bicultural/biracial child, Chávez-Silverman spent years of her childhood and adolescence traveling between Guadalajara, Madrid, and California; she also developed an excellent ability to move with ease between languages. Unlike Braschi, Chávez-Silverman learned Spanish and English at the same time in early childhood and is therefore a simultaneous bilingual; her entire life has been lived between two languages.[17] As an adult academic, her fascination with international travel and language continues.

Killer Crónicas is a series of letters that began as e-mail correspondence and developed into "crónicas." Most of the crónicas were written to family and friends during travel to Argentina. This epistolary text is completely bilingual, from beginning to end. There is rarely a sentence that does not contain both Spanish and English. Chávez-Silverman explains, "These crónicas began as letters: cartas a amigos extrañados, love letters to cities, smells, people, voice and geographies I missed. O, por otra parte, comenzaron como cartas a un lugar, or to a situation that I was experiencing intensely, casi con demasiada intensidad and yet pleasurably as well, a sabiendas de que la vivencia acabaría demasiado pronto" (xxi). Some linguists argue that the code-switching mode captured in *Killer Crónicas* is another language and this text would be a good example of sustained intrasentential code-switching, the type that is only seen in the speech of the most fluent bilingual speakers in a bilingual and bicultural community.[18]

In addition to code-switching, Chávez-Silverman frequently coins neologisms. She translates literally to produce some amusing renditions such as "La campanita ganchos" for bell hooks. She tells her students to open the book "*Killer*," referring to *El Matadero* by Esteban Echeverría. She also incorporates a spelling system that corresponds to her pronunciation of particular sounds. For example, she uses "h" to represent an aspirated "s" (ehta); "sh" to represent the Argentine phoneme "ch" as in (te shamo sho); and "th" to represent the Castilian Spanish "d" as in (Madrith). Like *Yo-Yo Boing!*, *Killer Crónicas* is a memoir on language, specifically on living a bilingual, bicultural life. And like Braschi's text, this one also follows the world of a bilingual academic who addresses the joy and pain of a writer's life and the life of an academic. She constantly moves in between spaces, in a manner

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reminiscent of what Gloria Anzaldúa describes as life on the borderland. These texts, which cannot be translated into either Spanish or English without losing the essence of the intercultural message, are not easily decipherable by monolinguals. When discussing her linguistic preferences, Chávez-Silverman states, "I consciously chose to remain bilingual, to resist the imperative to choose between, keenly aware of the marketing and readership risks this decision implied. . . . My fervent wish is that my book, in a modest way, may contribute to a reconceptualization of ethnic and/or minority writing and identity, and especially, its relationship to language(s)" (qtd. in Chia 1). She hopes her book will inspire others to write bilingual texts, not only in the US, but also internationally, as there are many places where one's identity is expressed in more than one language. Both Braschi and Chávez-Silverman insist that bilingual writing is very much a part of the US literary experience. Such bilingual texts do not necessarily totally exclude monolingual audiences. In a discussion of the performance of bilingual drama, Debra Castillo points out, "That monolingual audiences from either Spanish or English are invited to experience the play and undergo a sense of partial exclusion is very much the point, creating a different but not invalid response (170). The degree to which monolingual readers will accept this challenge to endure partial exclusion cannot yet be known.

Conclusion

The range of strategies chosen by Latino/a writers invites a discussion of the accessibility of these Latino/a texts. Are writers, by signaling otherness through their language choice, consciously trying to exclude some readers? Sommer argues that minority writers very deliberately intend to keep their readers uninformed by "announcing limited access" through their use of language (23). Ch'ien disagrees. She believes that minority writers, especially immigrant writers, are always involved in a writing project that consists of translation and interpretation. These writers, according to Ch'ien, are "not so conscious of audience but of the language they are producing" (23). They are seeking to be intelligible, and they want their political messages to be communicated. With

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regard to Latino/a writers, both Ch'ien and Sommer may be correct; most Latino/a writers who use Spanish in their work sometimes do announce limited access but, more often than not, they are also very conscious of their various imagined audiences and write to accommodate all readers. Very few Latino/a writers choose to write a text that will potentially limit their readership to a bilingual audience only.

Of course, using Spanish overtly or covertly in new English language texts is just one technique that writers have at their disposal to appropriate and reconfigure prose. Obviously, character and plot development, as well as other narrative techniques, can render a Latino/a text resistant at other levels. Latino/a texts published by mainstream presses are packaged as minority commodities and are sometimes complicit in this production, while simultaneously resisting a totalizing commodification. As McCracken suggests for Latina texts, "The attempted reconversation of social antagonisms in order to sell books, magazines, and other mass-cultural versions of the Latina Other is marked by contradiction, for these narratives give voice to unexpected and uncontainable social problematics that break through the pleasing veneer of the ideal Latina postmodern commodity" (39).

With regard to language and the use of Spanish in Latino/a prose writing for mainstream publication, there is often a tension between moments in the text where strategies result in the all too familiar production of Spanish as a Latino/a commodity and other moments where Spanish is used in a subversive way. In some cases, Spanish is used to grant entry into a Latino/a culture and reduce the distance between Anglo-American and Latino/a culture. In other cases, Spanish is used to foreground difference and deny access. In the latter cases, as Sánchez points out, the message may be that "otherness is unsolvable" (856).[19]

However, it is instructive to remember that multilingual texts work differently for different audiences. Dasenbrock suggests that the task of the bilingual and monolingual reader is dissimilar, and the monolingual experience may be richer because the monolingual reader has to work harder to understand the text's meaning. From this perspective, monolingual readers of texts with many bilingual passages may come to understand that asymmetrical power relationships and cultural dissimilarity mean that readers

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will experience texts differently, depending on their social and cultural positionality.

Finally, an important contribution of these texts is that they continue to document the multilingual reality that exists in this country. Latino/a fictional texts are an example of a contact zone where English and Spanish confront each other and comfortably or uncomfortably coexist.[20] Latino/a writers who incorporate Spanish in various ways appropriate standard English and rework it so that it conveys the linguistic reality of a multilingual population. The range of strategies that they implement make clear that there is not just one English or even one Spanish/English bilingual experience; they capture the multiple ways in which Spanish is seeping into English language prose texts. As the number and power of Latino/as in the United States increases, it will be interesting to see if Spanish continues to muscle its way into what have been exclusively English language arenas. If radical bilingual literary texts prove to be viable in the marketplace, it is conceivable that in the coming years Spanish will appropriate more and more textual space in Latino/a fiction published by mainstream presses.

Notes

1. Latino/as who code-switch are often judged as ignorant or lazy by educators and even other Latino/a community members who believe that languages should be kept separate. See Torres's *Puerto Rican Discourse* and Zentella for a discussion of code-switching practices and attitudes in the Puerto Rican community.
2. See Martín-Rodríguez for an analysis of the linguistic and marketing strategies used by Chicano/a writers since the 1960s. He argues that Chicano/a writers use an array of linguistic strategies, depending on their chosen audience. Those Chicano/a writers committed to producing literature for their bilingual communities tend to publish with smaller Latino/a presses.
3. In the last three decades in the US, language politics have become increasingly contentious. The 1980s and 1990s witnessed the proliferation of English-Only laws across the states. Although an attempt to make English the official language of the United States failed in 1981 and 1988, currently twenty-four states have declared English their official language. In California in 1998, along with a string of other anti-immigrant referendums, voters passed proposition 227, which for all intents and purposes eliminated bilingual education programs in the schools. In the last few decades, laws condemning the Spanish language proliferated. There have been a number of federal court cases based on illegal enforcement of "English-Only" workplace rules. Across the country, Latino/as

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claimed that they were fired for speaking Spanish during work breaks and in conversations with Spanish-speaking clients, both of which purportedly violated English-Only policies. Generally, then, in the US, Spanish is tolerated if it is commodified, simplified, and easily accessible to English speaking monolinguals; otherwise, if the Spanish language is unintelligible to monolingual Americans, and therefore out of their control, it can be sanctioned and its speakers punished. The asymmetric relationship between English and Spanish in the United States has a long history, rooted in imperialism, colonialism, and fear of immigration from Latin America. See Ana Margarita Cervantes-Rodríguez and Amy Lutz for a detailed analysis of this subject.

4. Latinidad is used to refer to a common Latino/a identity for the various Latin American peoples in the United States (i.e., Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican, etc.). It can be used as a term of solidarity among the various national groups in the US.

5. Rudin analyzes the use of Spanish in nineteen Chicano/a prose texts published from 1967 to 1985. Cutter also analyzes linguistic strategies of Chicano/a literature in the works of Moraga, Candelaria, Rodriguez, and Delgado.

6. The study is based on a corpus that includes nine novels and eight short stories. Texts range in size from three to over four hundred pages.

7. While monolingual readers may not grasp all the cultural subtleties of the Spanish language terms, given the contextual clues they will get the gist.

8. Given the contentious linguistic politics in the US about the use of languages other than English in public spaces, I disagree with Ortiz Cofer. I would argue that language use is almost always imbued with explicit or implicit political ramifications.

9. See McCracken (34-35) for other examples of ethnographic descriptions used to familiarize texts for monolingual readers.

10. Other sites where Spanish shares public space with English in US culture include mass media (i.e., advertisements, billboards), popular culture, and music. See Dávila for a discussion of the use of Spanish in US mass media.

11. hooks claims that the commodification of "Otherness" has been successful in the United States because it offers a way of experiencing life that is exotic, new, and exciting to Anglo-Americans who are generally bored and unstimulated by their own culture. She suggests that within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes the new spice that shakes up "the dull dish that is mainstream white culture" (21). However, encounters with an Other that do not place at risk one's position within society or culture allow dominant community members to explore foreign terrain without risking control.

12. McCracken argues that some Latina writers are complicit with this process of commodification but that they subvert this process and produce self-actualizing texts. She finds many "ruptural elements" (for example, a challenging portrayal of gender) that work against the production of the exotic Latina in the works of Ana Castillo, Sandra Cisneros, and Julia Alvarez, writers who have been embraced by mainstream publishers and monolingual reading audiences.

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13. Similarly, Spitta points out that translation tends to reduce the other to the familiar and effaces the text's difference, moving it into the territory of the monolingual reader.
14. See Ellen McCracken and Sonia Saldívar-Hull.
15. See Saldívar-Hull for a detailed analysis of how Cisneros reworks the legend of La Llorona in *Woman Hollering Creek.*
16. See Torres's "Construction of Self" for an exploration of language and culture in Latina autobiographical texts.
17. See Grosjean for a discussion of the typology of bilingualism and the implications of learning two languages in early childhood, as opposed to later in life.
18. There are very few cases in Chávez-Silverman's work that violate the proposed rules of oral code-switching: the equivalence constraint and the free morpheme constraint. The equivalence constraint states that code-switching will not take place at sites where a switch would violate a syntactic rule of either language. The free morpheme constraint states that bound morphemes will not be switched. See Poplack for a discussion of how these constraints condition code-switching.
19. See Sánchez for an analysis of Edward Rivera's novel *Family Installment.* She argues that Rivera educates the monolingual reader about the difficulties of overcoming cultural difference in a multilingual text. Sánchez demonstrates how Rivera's text reveals the limits of accessibility to Puerto Rican culture through a parallel process of defamilarization of English language and culture.
20. Mary Louise Pratt describes contact zones as spaces where cultures meet and contend with each other, in situations where one group has more power than the other.

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